



CATECHETICAL SUNDAY

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Background on and Changes in the New Translation of the Roman Missal

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Pope John Paul II presented the Church with a gift for the millennium: the third edition of the *Missale Romanum* (Roman Missal) since the Second Vatican Council. The Roman Missal is the book that sits on the altar at Mass and contains all the prayers and a description of the actions that make up the celebration of the Mass, “the source and summit of the entire Christian Life.”

Along with this new missal, the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments provided us with an entirely new instruction on the translation of liturgical texts entitled *Liturgiam Authenticam*. This instruction, the fruit of decades of consultation, describes a new way of translating that is more capable of conveying the meaning, beauty, and form of the ancient Latin prayers. Indeed, the vast majority of the prayers we pray at Mass have been preserved by the Latin Church for more than a thousand years and help not only to hand on what we believe but also to make clear who we are.

The prayers of the *Roman Missal* serve an indispensable role in passing on the faith, for, as the ancient axiom *lex orandi, lex credendi* reminds us, what we pray is what we believe. The authentic translation of these prayers,

therefore, plays an important role in the catechetical life of the Church.

Thanks to the new *Roman Missal* and the instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam*, the Church in the English-speaking world will receive a new translation of the Mass, beginning with the First Sunday of Advent of 2011. Catechists will play an important role, not only in the effective introduction of these texts at Mass, but also in the exciting process of unpacking their meaning for years to come.

How Did a New Translation Come About?

The principles of translation by which our present liturgical books were rendered into English were first articulated in the 1968 instruction *Comme le prévoit*. Although admirable in its attempts to enthusiastically and creatively render a text into modern forms of English, the 1968 instruction’s reliance on the subjective judgments of the translator often ended up with a time-bound translation influenced by the translator’s theological presuppositions.

In the subsequent decades, a new way of translating evolved that engaged a variety of experts, from Latinists and patrologists to theologians and pastors,

musicians and poets, and specialists in English literature. Such a collaborative model of translation sought to reach a final product that was at once more precise and more memorable. It was a task as ambitious as the process to achieve it was complex.

The first agent of liturgical translation is the conference of bishops, which is charged by the Council Fathers with the translation and approval of liturgical texts. Bishops, however, are not necessarily translators, so experts need to be engaged to accomplish this work. For this purpose, the Holy See forms mixed commissions at the requests of the conferences of bishops, organizations devoted exclusively to the development of translations of liturgical texts into a common language. The mixed commission for the English language is called the International Commission on English in the Liturgy (ICEL) and is made up of the eleven major conferences of bishops where English is spoken. ICEL's chairman is Bishop Arthur Roche of Leeds, and the U.S. representative is Bishop Arthur Serratelli of Paterson. ICEL is located on Connecticut Avenue in Washington, D.C., but it employs specialists from around the English-speaking world to assist in its work of translating the Latin liturgical books into the sort of English that is spoken today.

Over the past decade, our conference of bishops, the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, has reviewed translations of the *Roman Missal* produced by ICEL in several different forms. In November 2009, the bishops approved the last of the twelve segments of the *Roman Missal* by the requisite two-thirds vote of all *de iure* Latin rite members.

The Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, essentially the Pope's Liturgy Office, hold the responsibility of reviewing all translations of liturgical texts that have been approved by conferences of bishops. Cardinal Antonio Cañizares Llovera serves as prefect to that congregation, while two native English speakers—Archbishop J. Augustine DiNoia, OP, and Reverend Anthony Ward, SM—serve as secretary and undersecretary, respectively.

So important is the task of confirmation of the Roman Missal, that with the advent of the instruction *Liturgiam Authenticam*, the congregation undertook the formation of a committee of advice on the question of the translation of English-language liturgical texts. That committee is chaired by Cardinal George Pell of Sydney and is composed of senior prelates from all around the English-speaking world.

On March 25, 2010, the English language edition of the Roman Missal was confirmed (Prot 269/10/LIn), an event commemorated by a luncheon with the Vox Clara Committee in the presence of the Holy Father.

What Are Some of the Changes in the New Translation?

Many of the changes perform a function as simple as translating words that were omitted in prior renderings. Sometimes the words omitted in the prior translation emphasize our need for God's mercy, as in the Confiteor, where the accurate rendering of the *triplex mea culpa* and the adjective

nimis bring the translation close to the original:

*I confess to almighty God
and to you, my brothers and sisters,
that I have greatly sinned,
in my thoughts and in my words,
in what I have done and in what I
have failed to do,*

*And, striking their breast, they
say:
through my fault, through my fault,
through my most grievous fault;*

*Then they continue:
therefore I ask blessed Mary ever-
Virgin, all the Angels and Saints,
and you, my brothers and sisters,
to pray for me to the Lord our God.*

The most changed of all the parts reserved to the people is the *Gloria*, which is a kind of nonbiblical psalm, a venerable hymn that, in its earliest form, was used at more solemn Masses throughout the Church year. Although much of the hymn had been rearranged and some lines had been omitted in our present rendering, the new text is both precise and singable:

*Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace to people of good
will.*

*We praise you,
we bless you,
we adore you,
we glorify you,
we give you thanks for your great
glory,*

*Lord God, heavenly King,
O God, almighty Father.*

*Lord Jesus Christ, Only Begotten Son,
Lord God, Lamb of God, Son of the
Father,*

*you take away the sins of the world,
have mercy on us;*

*you take away the sins of the world,
receive our prayer;
you are seated at the right hand of
the Father,*

have mercy on us.

*For you alone are the Holy One,
you alone are the Lord,
you alone are the Most High,
Jesus Christ,
with the Holy Spirit,
in the glory of God the Father.
Amen.*

Several other examples of minor changes to the parts reserved for the people help enhance our understanding of the meaning of the words we speak at Mass, including the more accurate rendering of *meum ac vestrum sacrificium* in the Oration, providing a deeper reflection on the sacrifice of Calvary offered at the hands of the priest and the spiritual sacrifices offered by the people of God:

*Pray, brethren (brothers and
sisters),
that my sacrifice and yours
may be acceptable to God,
the almighty Father.*

Likewise, a more precise rendering of the *Ecce Agnus Dei* highlights the contrast between the extraordinary eschatology of the invitation and the profound personalism of the response—a contrast not readily apparent in the prior rendering:

*Behold the Lamb of God,
behold him who takes away the sins
of the world.
Blessed are those called to the supper
of the Lamb.*

*And together with the people he
adds once:
Lord, I am not worthy*

*that you should enter under my roof,
but only say the word
and my soul shall be healed.*

Finally, the widely known dialogue between priest and people—*Dominus vobiscum . . . Et cum spiritu tuo*—will be more precisely translated as *The Lord be with you . . . And with your spirit*. This change reflects the important distinction between the roles of priest and people for which it has been used since the Apostolic Tradition of the early third century. This dialogue between priest and people, which has preceded every important liturgical action in both East and West, defines the roles of a priestly people in whose midst God dwells and of the ordained

priest, who acts by virtue of the Spirit he has received in his ordination. Although certain pastoral challenges in the implementation of this change are evident, its theological importance in a day and age in which priesthood is often misunderstood could not be more timely.

The proper understanding of these and other texts from the newly translated 1,200-page missal will be a challenge for catechists and all pastoral practitioners for decades to come. The Sacred Liturgy is the font of the entire Christian life, a font whose waters are clearer in this translation than ever before.

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